

# History of Fort Yates

By  
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## CHAPTER II.

**T**HE VERY earliest history of this section we have is found in the diary of Lewis and Clark, who with forty men came toiling up the Missouri river in the summer of 1804 on their trip of exploration to the Pacific coast.

At that time the Arickaree, or Ree Indians, lived along the river here as far south as the mouth of the Grand or Ree river. At this point there were two villages of these people, the lodges being constructed of poles and willows woven to form an enclosure about 15 feet in diameter, and covered with mud and clay. These Indians did a good deal of farming; raising corn, beans, pumpkins, watermelons, squashes; "and a species of tobacco peculiar to themselves," on the large island at the mouth of the Grand river. There was also a large village of Rees just north of the Kenel school, eighteen miles south of Fort Yates, but in the years that followed, the Sioux came up from the south and drove the Rees north in a series of skirmishes, the most sanguinary occurring around Fireheart Butte, and here on the very ground on which the Agency Boarding school stands, from which the Rees retreated over the top of Proposal hill. At the upper end of this hill a Sioux was killed, and the place has been haunted ever since, so they say. Also, six Sioux are said to have been killed in the ravine three miles north, just above the old No. 1 Day school, and six miles further on a big fight took place for which the valley and water course there has been named Battle creek.

The location of Indian agencies in the Sioux country on the west side of the Missouri river came about in this way: During the '60's the government had attempted to open up a trail running west of the Black Hills, from the Platte river to the gold fields of Montana. But the Sioux made it so hot for the soldiers which were sent out to maintain forts along the way, that it was deemed expedient to formulate some kind of a treaty with them. In "The Taming of the Sioux," by Frank Fiske, the following extract tells what happened:

"In July, 1867, by Act of Congress, a peace commission was appointed to confer politely with Red Cloud and other Sioux chiefs, and endeavor to ascertain the cause of their disaffection, as if the government didn't know. It took the rest of the summer and all fall to arrange a meeting with Red Cloud, to be held at Fort Laramie, and then the wily old chief did not go down, but sent word that there was just one thing he wanted, and that was the withdrawal of the soldiers on the Montana trail, and that he would meet the commission the next spring or summer.

"The following year, on April 29, a treaty was signed with twenty-four chiefs, not including Red Cloud. It was a nice, friendly treaty, full of promises of peace and good will on the part of the government, and by it the entire of South Dakota from the Missouri river to the silent peaks of the Black Hills was designated and set aside as a reservation for the Sioux. An agency with a set of efficient employees was promised to be built on the Missouri at the expense of the government. Any Indian who so desired was given the right to select 320 acres of land in this domain for farming purposes, and he would be furnished with all necessary farming implements, in addition he should have the assistance of the agency farmer to help him in his tussle with the virgin soil. A generous amount of rations, in the form of food and clothing would be forthcoming, and schools were to be built for the enlightenment of the Indian children. No white person could settle upon this reservation, and he would have to obtain special permission from the Indian agent to pass over it. The government further promised that in ninety days after the cessation of hostilities it would withdraw the troops from Forts Phil Kearney, C. F. Smith and Reno on the Montana trail, and abandon the trail, thus leaving Red Cloud's beloved Powder River country west of the Black Hills, open and untrammelled by the contaminating influence of the white man for a while at least.

"But Red Cloud sent word that he would not sign the treaty nor cease his activities until he saw the positive abandonment of the trail, and after waiting a few months the government actually acceded to his demands and took the soldiers away. Then the independent old chief said he must attend to his fall hunting and get things in shape for winter, so it was not until November 6th, 1868, that he signed the treaty at Laramie in the presence of a large number of his people, thus attaining the greatest victory over the United States government ever accomplished by any man, red or white."

Instead of establishing just one large agency it was decided that three smaller ones would afford better service, and they were located by Gen. W. S. Harney, at Whetstone, 18 miles above Fort Randall; Cheyenne, 35 miles above Fort Pierre; and at the mouth of the Grand river near the present crossing of the Milwaukee railroad. They were established in the fall of 1868. The first agent in charge at Grand River Agency was Major Hearn. In '69 he was relieved by Dr. Cady. In '71 Col. O'Connor relieved him, and in 1873 Edmond Palmer tried his luck in handling the situation. It will be observed that the position of Indian agent during these years was fraught with many trials and tribulations. There was very little satisfaction in holding such a job, for while the opportunities for innocent grafting were many, there was no lasting benefit derived from it. By running a bunch of cattle around a hill and counting them over and over again, or piling sacks of flour in a square so that the center could be left vacant and covered with a tarpaulin to make it look like a solid pile, you could get away with a good deal of money, but you would be asked to turn over your office to some other fellow, and thus be deprived of your splendid chance of acquiring a fortune. Of course there must have been honest Indian agents in those days, but we hear only of the other kind. There was one at Grand river who is said to have remained there a very short time, and when he was asked to resign, he left with \$250,000. Not a bad little nest egg for future rainy days. But he soon lost it all, and returned to the Indian country to work at anything he could get.

In 1873 it was found necessary to abandon the Grand River Agency, as the Missouri river was about to cut it away, and a point was selected about 45 miles farther up the river where the greater number of northern Sioux could be reached. An ideal location was found on the gently sloping plateau south of Proposal Hill, as described before, and on the Fourth of July, 44 years ago, the steamer Mollie Moore left the old Grand River Agency with the first load of material and supplies for the new Agency. Tom Mariner, or Brocky Tom, was master, and she carried 26 soldiers of "E" and "G" Companies, 17th U. S. Infantry, Sergt. Meyers in charge. Members of that squad, whose names are familiar to residents here, are William P. Zahn, of Solen; John Manning, of Poplar, Montana; Paddy Finn and Jesse Jordan, both deceased.

The boat landed at the little swale above the Agency pump house, and construction work was started at once. Edmond Palmer was still agent, and had charge of the removal. Mr. Zahn says that the boat made its first landing at the mouth of Porcupine creek, five miles north, but backed down here, at the request of Major Palmer, who decided that this was a more favorable location. H. A. Archambault, then a young man, was foreman of construction, and it may be said that he is still living on the reservation, having married a Sioux woman with whom he raised a fine large family. Capt. John Hardy was the government farmer in charge, and he was drowned that same summer at the Grand river, whither he had returned to issue supplies which still remained there.

In August, '73, the contract was let to complete the construction of the new agency, and for \$30,000 John B. Dillon and William Harmon put up the log buildings in a square formation on the level land where the modern office and residence buildings of the Fort Yates Agency now stand, and at this day not one of the original buildings remain to bear witness to these assertions.

(Continued Next Week)